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Legendary crescent moon katana, one of Japan's Five Swords Under Heaven, now on display in Tokyo

Casey Baseel Jul 21, 2017

One of Japan's most beautiful and important katana is proving popular with history buffs and young ladies alike.

The **Tokyo National Museum** is, unsurprisingly, one of the best places to see Japanese works of art and historical artifacts. If you've got even a passing interest in either, the facility, located in the **Ueno** neighborhood, is a must-visit in Tokyo, but **right now there's an extra-compelling reason to stop by**.

While authentic **katana** are always a mesmerizing sight to see, experts say that none are more so than the **Tenko Goken**, or **Five Swords Under Heaven**. These five blades exhibit craftsmanship and cultural significance above all others, and **the katana considered the most beautiful of the group, Mikazuki Munechika, is currently on display at the Tokyo National Museum**.

▼ The museum itself is no slouch in the looks department either.

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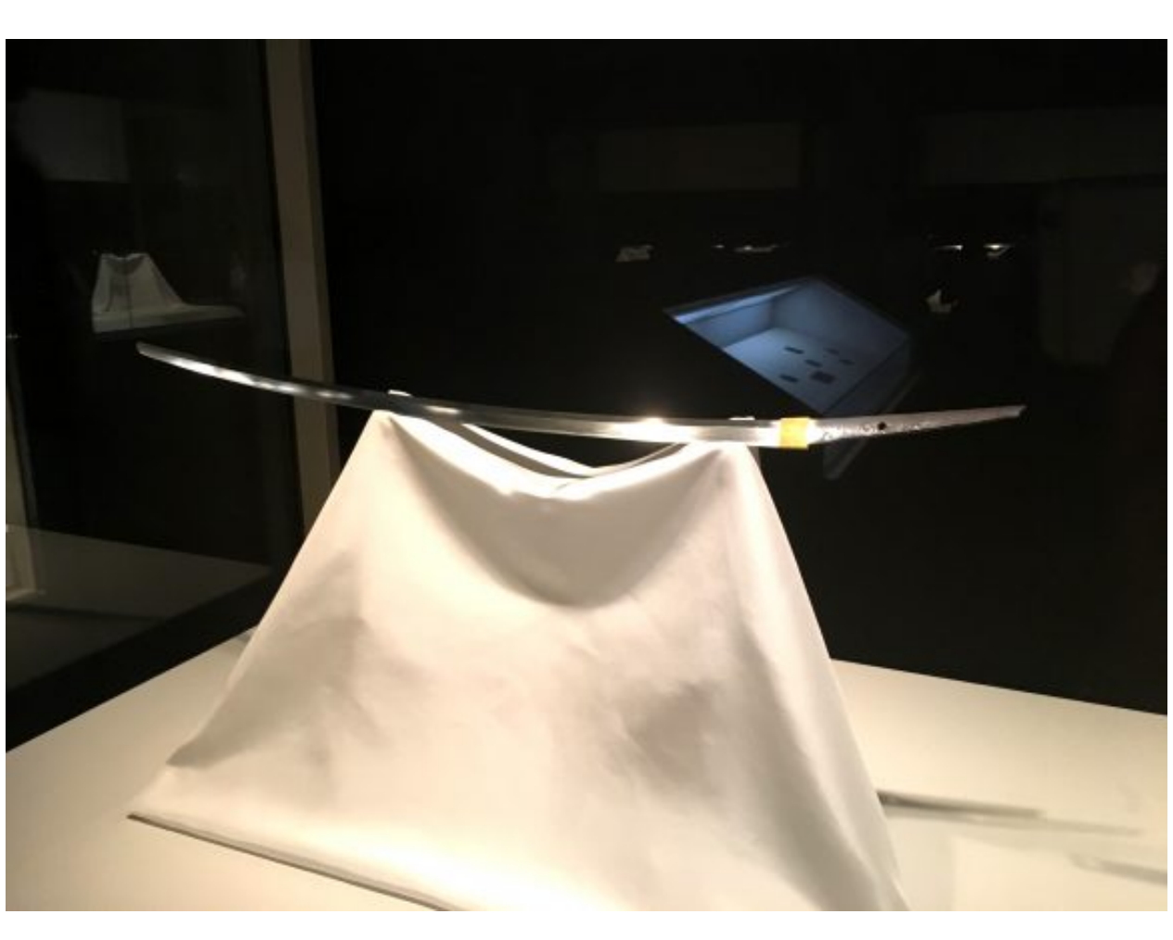
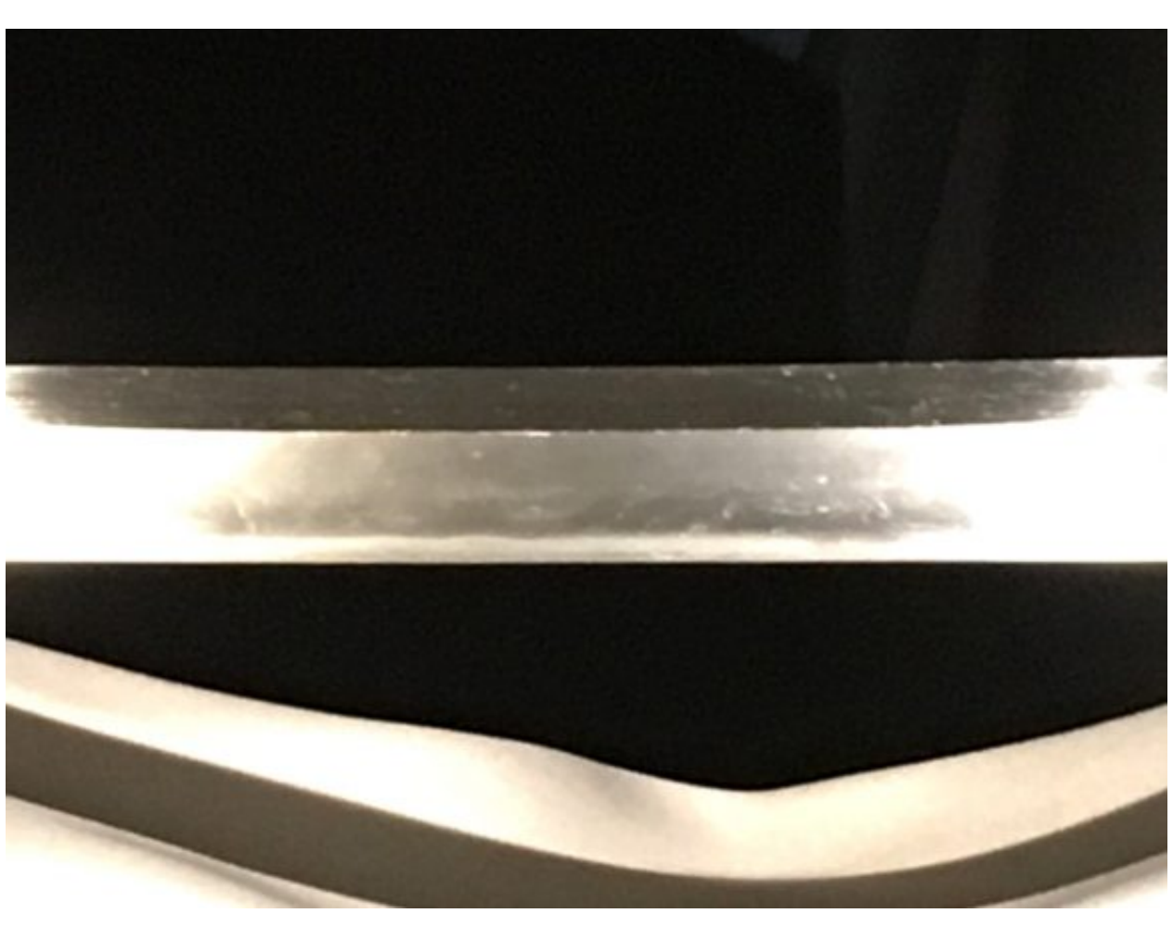
If Mikazuki Munechika sounds more like a name for a person than a sword to you, you're actually half right. **Sanjo Munechika** was one of the most skilled swordsmiths of Japan's Heian period, which lasted from 794 to 1185. The Mikazuki Munechika, **created in the late 10th century**, is considered his masterwork, and bears his personal name.

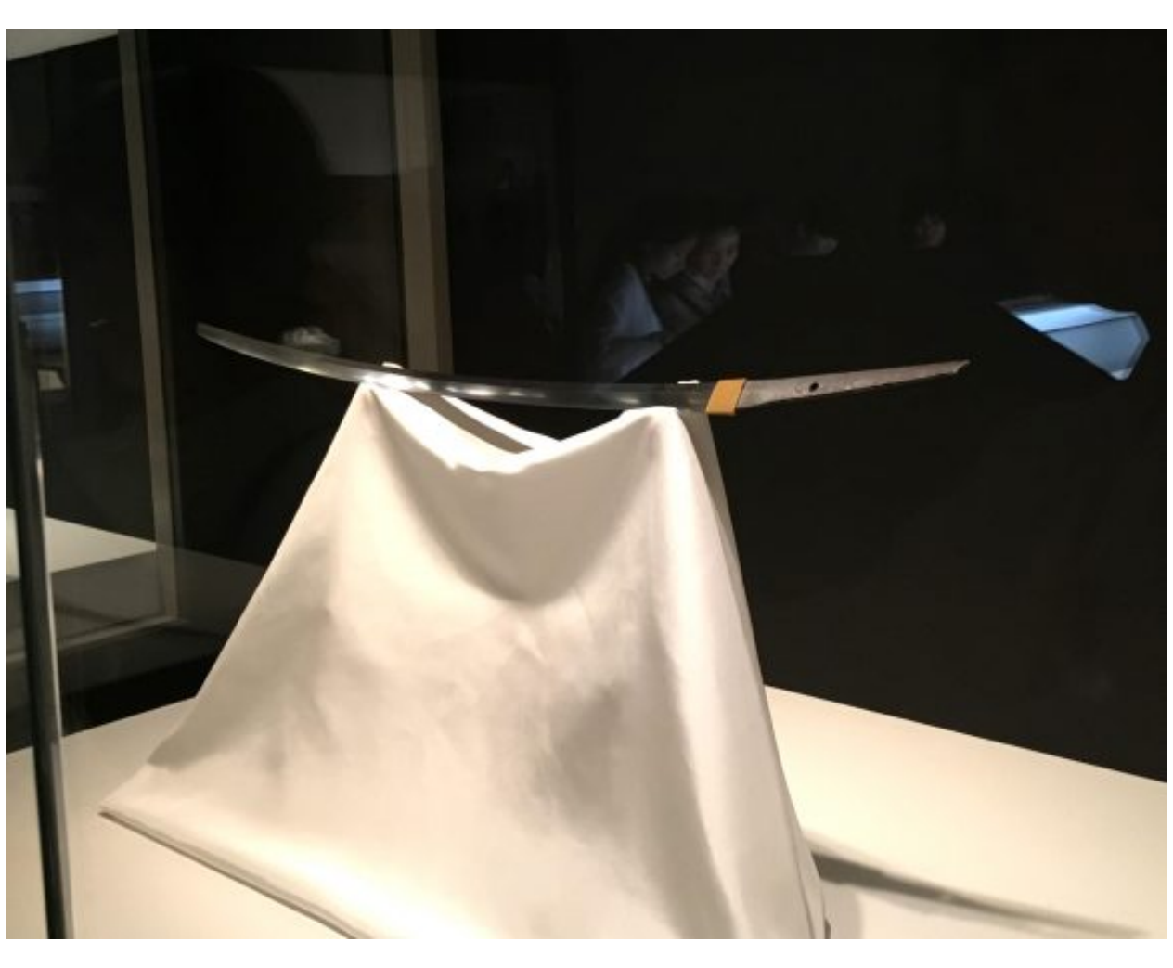


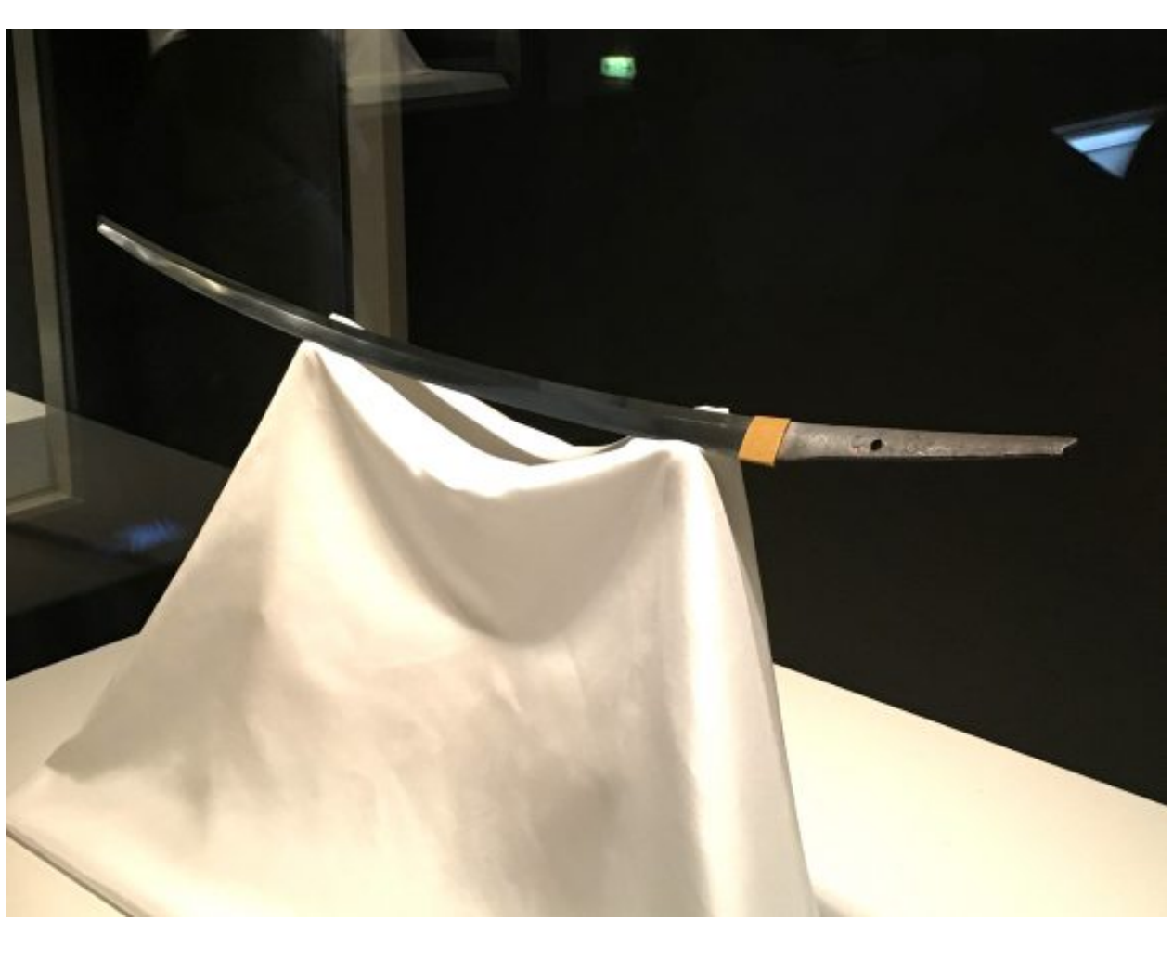
As for the rest of the sword's name, *mikazuki* is the Japanese word for **"crescent moon."** During the tempering and quenching process, katana often acquire unique markings along the flat of the blade. In the case of Mikazuki Munechika, marking called uchi no ke, shaped like crescent moons, were formed.

The markings, unfortunately, are almost impossible to photograph from behind the sword's protective glass, but the elegant curve of the blade and the shine of its steel are undiminished in their ability to captivate.

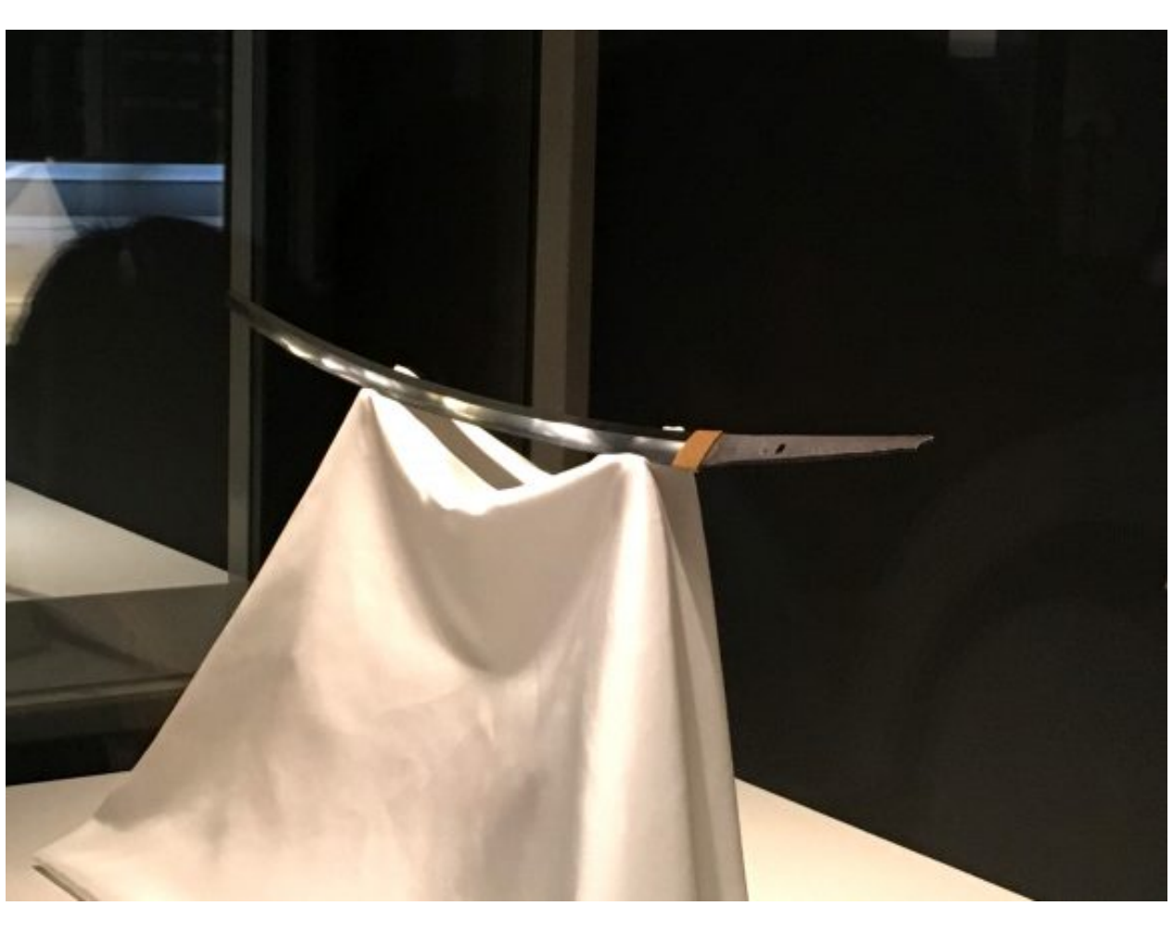


Mikazuki Munechika has been in the hands of some extremely powerful people during its millennium-long history, including 16th century samurai warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi and the Tokugawa shoguns. Now an officially designated national treasure, the sword has become the property of the Tokyo National Museum.

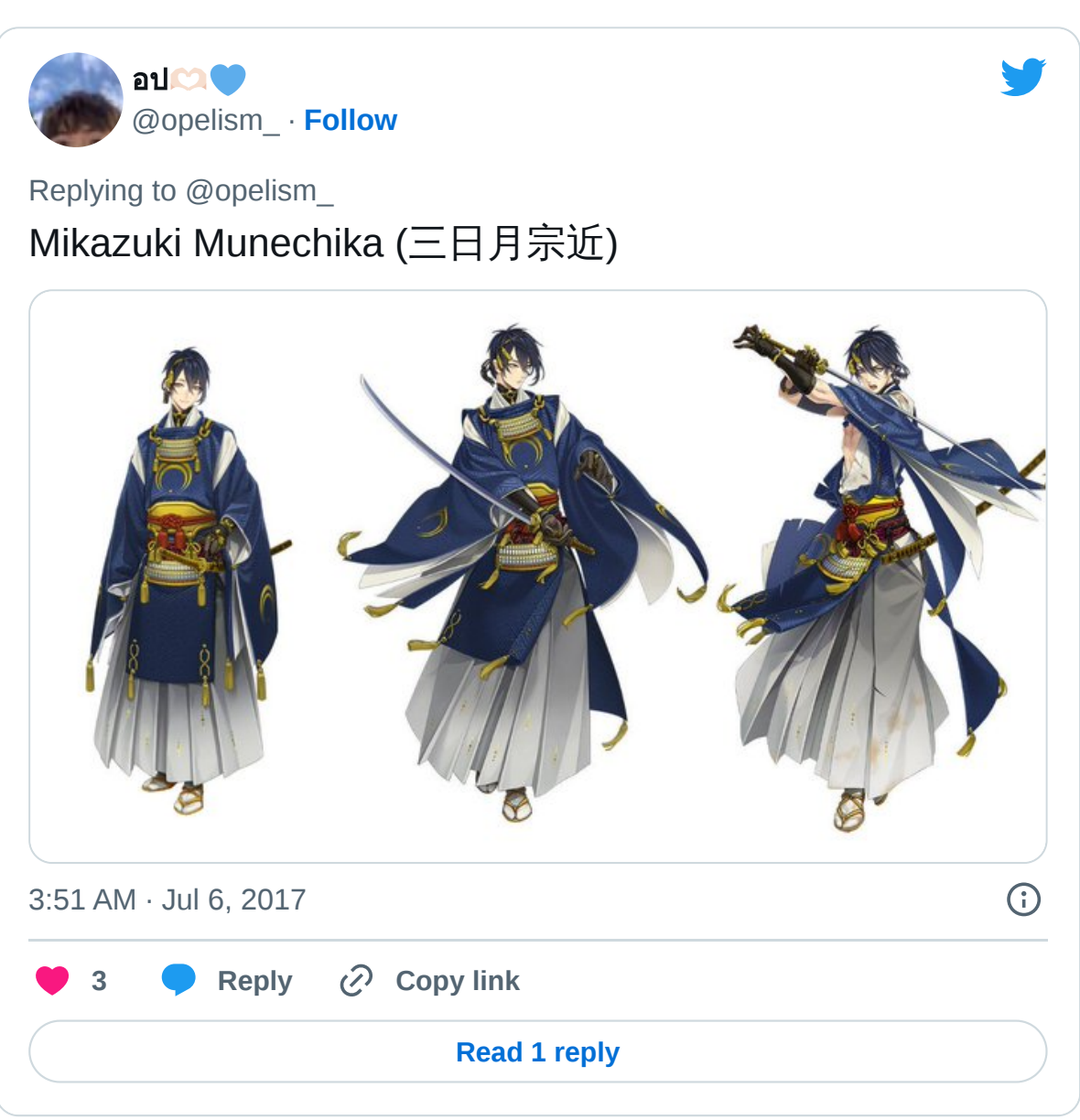




While not constantly available for public viewing, the sword went on display July 19, delighting not only history buffs, but also fans of the **Touken Ranbu** anime and video game franchise.



Touken Ranbu's hook is that it anthropomorphizes historical katana as delicately handsome young men, and the character based on Mikazuki Munechika, who shares his name with the sword, has become he franchise's poster sword-boy.



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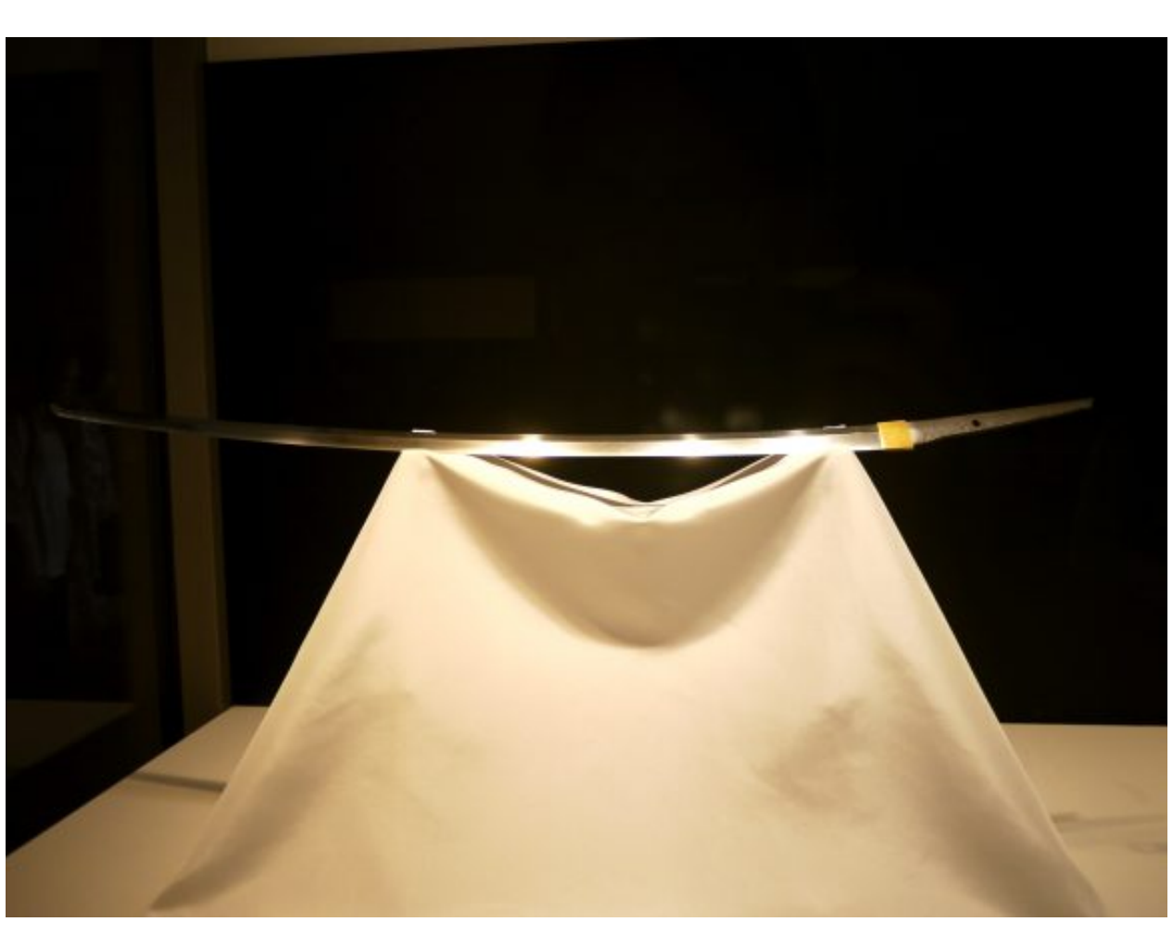
▼ Uncanny resemblance?

As a result of *Touken Ranbu's* powerfully passionate female fanbase, crowds of young women are flocking to **room 13 of the Tokyo National Museum's main building**, where Mikazuki Munechika is being displayed. While photography of the sword is allowed, in order to keep the line of shutterbugs moving visitors are asked to limit themselves to one photo at a time, and to line up once again if they want to take a second shot.



The special slice of katana history will be on display until October 15.

Museum information
Tokyo National Museum / 東京国立博物館
Address:Tokyo-to, Taito-ku, Ueno Koen 13-9
東京都台東区上野公園13-9
Open 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m.
Admission 620 yen (US$5.60)
Website

Photos ©SoraNews24
[**Read in Japanese**]

Follow Casey on ***Twitter****, where he's wondering where he put that Tokyo National Museum mouse pad his dad bought for him.*

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